

Australian Paul Kelly is one of the great under-recognized talents of rock 'n' roll. Together with his now-former band The Messengers, he made a couple of great albums for which he was rewarded by being dropped by A & M records. Simply put, Kelly writes catchy and moving songs that owe a lot to country and folk-rock, but reveal a knowledge of all rock 'n' roll. He sings in a way that always hits you and plays with amazing taste and style. Kelly's latest Comedy (Dr. Dream) isn't his best, but there's still lots to like from the opening "Don't Start Me Talking" to "It's All Downhill From Here," and the humorous "Your Little Sister (Is a Big Girl Now)" "Sydney From a 727," a takeoff on Jimmie Dale Gilmore's "Dallas." Kelly makes a rare acoustic appearance Friday, with local singer-songwriter Tom Holland.

It's been a couple of years since Darden Smith's last album, but the best tracks such as "Midnight Train," "All the King's Horses," "2,000 Years" and "Ashes to Ashes" still hold up. The new all-acoustic club Tin Angel, where you can sit at tables and enjoy a show (without drunks crashing into you) should be the perfect environment for Smith's highly personal songs and performing style. Local musician Laura Mann opens.

Paul Kelly with Tom Holland: Fri., Dec. 11 at 8 p.m. at J.C. Dobbs, 304 South St. 928-1943.

Darden Smith with Laura Mann: Sat., Dec. 12 at 8 and 10:30 p.m. at the Tin Angel, 20 S. 2nd St., \$7, 928-0978.

--Peter Brown